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BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ [2018](#) (2)

▶ [March](#) (1)

▼ [January](#) (1)

[The Story of the Ghost](#)

▶ [2017](#) (4)

▶ [2016](#) (6)

▶ [2015](#) (3)

▶ [2014](#) (19)

▶ [2013](#) (1)

▶ [2012](#) (1)

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2018

The Story of the Ghost

I FEEL I'VE NEVER TOLD YOU

...the Story of the Ghost...

It was 1999... or 2000... I don't quite remember. We never slept. We would audit source code for days on end, mostly the OpenBSD or Linux kernel, looking for strange bugs despite not knowing what the hell we were doing. We'd write scripts to fuzz command-line applications, begging binaries to reveal 0days. Jaime had just written a script that hacked somewhere around 1800 computers in under 60 seconds.

We called her Zero Cool. For obvious reasons.

When the press caught wind of this, she did what she always did: she made it amusing. She'd joke with them about rage-rm'ing servers (even though she never actually did anything malicious) and mass website defacements in the name of Jerr Bear. To us, it was just another day at the script kiddie office.

Then, the South Koreans called.

Somehow, a South Korean television talk show interested in doing a piece on hackers got a hold of us because of Jaime's recent notoriety. An mIRC session or two later, the television show's runners joined our IRC channel and began chatting us up about nuclear security. Somehow they got the idea that we were mature professionals with slick hair and ties (people still wore ties back then; this was pre-Zuk-hoodie landscape). We'd chat through private messages and make sure our responses were coordinated, reasonable, and even cautious.

The thing was, even though Jaime was a notorious troll, she was a light hearted troll. She never wanted to - or meant to - hurt anyone. And she actually loved the art of hacking. She wanted people to understand the dangers as well as the beauty behind the keystrokes that cut us and make us bleed.

We sounded so conservative and restrained in our discussion with the TV crew that they ended up airing a segment after translating our interviews. Next thing we knew? We were on national South Korean television talking about the threat of hacking nuclear facilities.

Of course, the translation ended up making us sound a bit more urgent than we intended... but what did we care? They used our "hacker names" and showed us as shadowy blackhat JPEGs.

I used to have a video of the interview. Funny enough, I even tried to search for it a few months back. I never did find it. It's been lost in Internet time, but Jaime still thought it was hilarious.

CHARACTER ZERO

Over the 18+ years I knew Jaime, she and I remained close for the majority of it. There were times when she would disappear for a year or two, but she always resurfaced with new stories to tell. She lived down the street from me for a year or so in Denver. I was out of the country so often during that time that we barely got to hang out, but when we did it was always Old Times.

She used to give me a lot of shit for not keeping up with my violin or guitar practice.

One of the reasons we became fast friends in 1999 was that we both had a background in music. For those that don't know, Jaime wasn't just an avid Phish head, she was an exceptional guitarist. She played in a few bands and was extremely gifted. Even though I was raised to be a concert violinist, her guitar skills vastly out-shined mine. I was always jealous of her.

A couple of years ago, I picked up the guitar again and actually started practicing. We played together in San Francisco a year or so ago and she complimented my soloing. That was the first and only time she actually gave me props. It might sound silly, but it was an interesting moment. She'd been giving me shit for 16 years at that point, and was finally proud that I was practicing again.



But I hope she knew how proud of her I was.

She was the first person to see how hard I was trying to learn engineering and information security and keep at me to continue pursuing it. Even when I was frustrated and ready to give up, she always stood by me and supported my efforts. From the time we were teenagers up until a month ago, she was always a solid friend.

And I always stood by her. We grew in different directions as we got older. I tend to be a bit of a "bro" (and she gave me shit for it), but we always found common ground and maintained our closeness. Because of that, we never moved on from our friendship. We worked hard to maintain it and respect each other,

despite living very different lifestyles.

That, to me, was Jaime. Someone that was always trying to live as honestly and emotionally full as she possibly could. Someone that would tell you you fucking suck to be honest one minute, but hug you and tell you she loved you despite you sucking the next, then finally would tell you what you could do to suck less. She was the dagger, but she was also the bandaid.

WHEN THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

I have a lot of amazing memories of Jaime and my exploits, from learning to write exploits in the 2000's, to the Root Shell Hackers days of yore, to the jam sessions at my apartment in Denver, to the time she attempted to give her first speech at 44con (which went horribly awry, but she really tried hard to make it work despite her anxiety), there isn't a story I have about Jaime that doesn't make me smile, even if it wasn't a perfect situation.

In fact, one of my favorite memories with her was an entirely imperfect and disgusting scene at Black Hat a few years back.

We were bouncing from party to party, as usual, when we ran into a friend from London in the IoT space. We were all sober, and were deciding where to go to gather our first drinks. We ended up at the NCC Group party, wherever it was that year, stopping in to say hello to some pals, then we were on our way to another suite where the actual partying would commence. Despite the brief stop-in, it was quite the eventful party.

In the short time we were there, a group of miscreants near the doorway began harassing Jaime, genuinely saying some pretty foul shit. They were all pretty drunk and I was trying to ignore them. But they were calling her some pretty awful things that I won't repeat here, related to her sexuality. One of these individuals even proceeded to text me, telling me "not to go home with her", among other pleasantries.

I responded by reminding this person that they had been in the same old school hacker crews that they were familiar with. We were all there when ADMutate was released. We were there when sadmind.c was dropped in #feed-the-goats. We were there when sk8 was arrested. We were there when phrack.ru was owned by someone who left 0day in a RWX home directory. We were there when GOBBLES owned the w00w00 server. We were there when xdr was raided. We were there when p4ntera disappeared into the Canadian ether. We were there when *someone* got caught backdooring the Linux kernel source. Cough.

She was there. For all of it.

When we left the party I looked at her, expecting to see some kind of frustration or disgust, as Jaime typically felt emotions very strongly. She just looked at me, shrugged, and said "Sunlight just don't sweeten trash, do it?"

We wandered off to the next party and ended up playing the piano under a laser light show while our British friend got so drunk they wandered off with a large novelty poster that we're quite certain they weren't supposed to take ;-)

WHILE MY GUITAR GENTLY WEEPS

While Jaime was able to turn away from pain like this, it eroded her armor over time. It erodes all of us. The bigotry. The sexual abuse. The violence.

No matter how we leave this Earth, we are leaving it a little less human than we were when we emerged from our mother's womb.

Jaime, more than anything, taught me to bide my time and take it slow. She taught me to listen to other people. She taught me to respect other lifestyles because you care about the human behind that mirage. She taught me that friendship didn't mean having everything in common with someone, but that friendship was simply about being there. It was about being human.

But she also taught me to rush and never waste the day. She lived hard. She lived brightly. She lived like a day couldn't be spared.

She was my best friend. And I'll miss her dearly.

Fare the Well,

Don A. Bailey

Posted by **Unknown** at **10:01 PM**

5 comments:



Cobby G January 10, 2018 at 12:32 AM

warmest condolences don from the PT family

she was super special and will be sorely missed

[Reply](#)

Rishabh January 10, 2018 at 10:58 AM

I am sorry for your loss, may she rest in peace.

[Reply](#)

Anonymous January 11, 2018 at 7:06 PM

Thank you for this. I have been subjected to similar things, also at Blackhat no less, and of course everywhere else I've ever worked, walked, or simply tried to live as a woman.

[Reply](#)

Anonymous January 22, 2018 at 6:18 PM

I'm really sorry for your loss, initd_. I don't know if I knew Jamie, but she sounds amazing through your memories. I remember piffy hacking 1800 South Korean websites in one night. I remember the shell script seeming like it took forever because there were so many domains. Those were good times.

Scurvy

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Don A. Bailey January 23, 2018 at 10:42 AM



Hey Scurvy, nice to hear from you :) Unfortunately, our good friend piffy was Jaime... Best wishes to you.

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